



ARTIGOS

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Karen Batista¹, Ana Paula Moura Saran², Ricardo Limongi², André Luiz Barbosa da Silva², Alessandra Cristina Gomes²

1 – Universidade Federal de Sergipe

2 – Universidade Federal de Goiás

ABSTRACT

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused changes in organizational communication. The moment requires companies to adopt a posture of sensitivity to the moment and contribution to society. Thus, in this article, we seek to reflect on how organizations have communicated with their consumers through two examples, Madero and Magazine Luiza. We also discuss how consumers have reacted to the actions of these companies on social networks, and finally, we present suggestions for organizational communication strategies in times of pandemic.

KEYWORDS: organizational communication, social media, pandemic, COVID-19.

RESUMO

O contexto da pandemia da COVID-19 tem causado mudanças na comunicação organizacional. O momento exige que as empresas adotem uma postura de sensibilidade ao momento e contribuição com a sociedade. Dessa forma, buscamos nesse artigo refletir sobre como as organizações têm se comunicado com os seus consumidores por meio de dois exemplos, Madero e Magazine Luiza. Discutimos ainda como os consumidores têm reagido às ações destas empresas nas redes sociais, e por fim, apresentamos sugestões de estratégias de comunicação organizacional em tempos de pandemia.

Palavras-chave: comunicação organizacional, mídias sociais, pandemia, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

The world has been through a severe health crisis caused by COVID-19 disease. The first confirmed case was on 10 December 2019, in Wuhan City, China. The virus spread rapidly to other countries, and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic situation on 11 March 2020. In Brazil, the first death attributed to the disease occurs on 17 March 2020 (WHO, 2020).

According to world bank projections (2020), Brazil will face a 5% drop in its gross domestic product in 2020. The retail context has been the most impact on sales volume during social isolation. Given this scenario, companies and consumers need to adapt to the changes that come from the crisis, especially communication. The difference in habits will influence consumer behavior, so companies need to rethink communication with consumers during and after the pandemic. Thus, in this article, we seek to reflect on how some companies communicate with their public, and manage possible organizational communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Organizational communication is fundamental for interaction between

companies and consumers. The information that companies share in the digital environment can bring impacts, positive or negative, to this image. At the same time that social media offers this space of interaction approaching the public, they offer risks, which can expose and potentiate weaknesses (MACHADO; BARRICHELLO, 2015).

The attitude that organizations assume during a crisis influences society's perception (SALVADOR; IKEDA, 2018). How companies react to the pandemic can influence purchasing decisions. On the report "Confidence in brands and pandemic of Coronavirus," conducted by the company Edelman (2020) in 12 countries, one of them, Brazil with more than 1,000 participants, identified that for 65% of Brazilians companies must protect the well-being and financial security of their employees, even if this results in significant economic losses until the pandemic ends if they want to win or maintain the confidence of their consumers (EDELMAN, 2020). So, companies that lay off employees' cut salaries will not be well regarded by consumers at the expense of profit. On the other hand, companies that carry out actions that contribute to society at that time to be remembered.

The pandemic has influenced people with high sensitivity also affects consumers' perception of the company's actions. Thus, organizational communication should be carefully thought out for this audience are more sensitive. However, how have Brazilian companies faced this delicate moment? Next, we will discuss the actions of some companies.

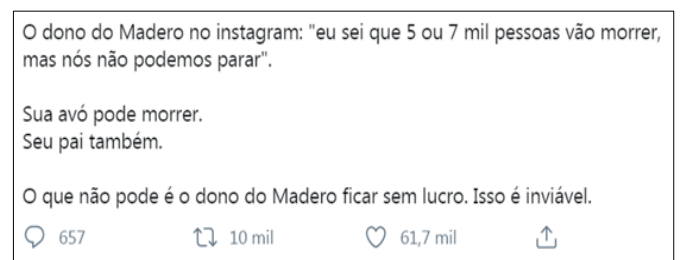
HOW HAVE COMPANIES COMMUNICATED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

To illustrate how Brazilian companies have reacted to the pandemic, we will use the restaurant chain of Madero and retailer Magazine Luiza. We chose these examples because of the repercussions on social media. On 23 March 2020, Madero's owner, Junior Durski, criticized the social isolation measures taken by Brazilian governors in a video on his Instagram profile, in which he stated: "5,000 people will die by a coronavirus that we cannot avoid. There is no way to close everything, hide from the enemy, and not work" (DURSKI, 2020).

In the social media post, the businessman wrote the following sentence: "30, 40 MILLION UNEMPLOYED. That is what we will have in 2021 if we do not stop this INSANE LOCKDOWN. 300, 400, 500,000 PEOPLE will die in the next two years in Brazil as a result of the economic damage caused by

LOCKDOWN" (DURSKI, 2020). The repercussion of the video on the Internet caused outrage in the users of various social media. Figure 1 presents a Twitter user's manifestation of Twitter the case.

Figure 1 | Tweet about Madero



Source: Twitter (2020)

On Twitter, the hashtags on the subject, as #Madero; #MaderoNuncaMais; #boicotemadero, were among Brazil's most commented topics on March 24, 25, and 26, reaching more than 116,000 tweets. Users suggested boycotting the restaurant, demonstrating their outrage with the comment of the businessman. As Figure 1, tweet about business has favored more than 61.000 Twitter users, retweet more than 10.000 accounts, and has had 657 comments' most of which are negative comments from customers stating that they will no longer visit the restaurant. This reflects the communication previously made by the brand loses its meaning since the observation of the entrepreneur brings up a delicate theme when referring values considered imposed by

the consumer, which it was believed that the company also regarded as necessary, and gained,, even more reach with comments from other users in their different networks.

Moreover the loss of consumers by the boycott, they start to have a negative image and may influence other people not to consume, as demonstrated by the survey conducted by Edelman (2020), in which 35% of Brazilians interviewed said they convinced others to stop using a brand that did not adequately respond to the pandemic. After the negative repercussion of the video, Junior Durski pronounced new, apologizing, in a video posted on his Instagram profile. However, on 2 April, the company laid off 600 employees after promising to keep the staff during the pandemic.

While the pronouncement of the Madero network owner has harmed its image, actions that aim to contribute to society during the pandemic have positive impacts. As an example, the maintenance of jobs, the support of employment, and the maintenance of employment by Magazine Luiza prioritize the health and safety of employees and customers. The company anticipated paid leave for more than 20,000 employees and claims to be paying double the daycare assistance. The retailer has launched in its app space where women who

suffer domestic violence can make a complaint. A donation of R\$ 10 million was also made to combat the coronavirus, announced on 27 March. On March 28 and 29, the tags #Magazine Luiza and #Magalu were on Trending Topics on Twitter. Figure 2 brings the example of a Twitter user who spoke about the company's actions during the pandemic.

Figure 2 | Twitter user comments on Magazine Luiza



Source: Twitter (2020)

The tweet shown in Figure 2, where the user praises the action of the company Magazine Luiza, was favored by 2,400 accounts, retweeted by 459 people, and obtained 46 comments, most of which were positive, agreeing with the tweet's statement. Despite being just an illustration, the difference between the repercussions of the two tweets makes us reflect on the impacts of the actions on the image of the companies mentioned since the company Madero was mentioned almost four times more than the Magazine Luiza store, in the days in who was on the trending topics.

The company Magazine Luiza is just one example of actions that can bring

contributions to society and build the right image that consumers will remember after the pandemic. According to the Edelman survey (2020), 76% of Brazilians surveyed said that a brand's response to the crisis would have a significant impact on the propensity to buy it in the future. Companies' actions in the face of the crisis will be in the consumer's memory and may positively or negatively impact the company's decisions, adhering, or boycotting the brand. In this sense, we discuss some initiatives that can help companies communicate in the pandemic context.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CONSUMERS DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Companies such as Google LLC and Twitter, Inc. have used their channels to assist small businesses in the next steps to be taken amid the context of the pandemic. Twitter, for example, through its Brazilian blog, shared a text guide called "Brand Communication in times of crisis," bringing suggestions for companies to communicate with their audience during the pandemic. The tips revolve around focusing the company's communication on informing consumers about what is happening in the world and the country, through reliable information, using a thoughtful tone in the messages, seeking to know what people are in need at this time,

providing adequate service and support whenever the customer wishes, and anticipating changes in consumer behavior that are reflective of social isolation resulting from the pandemic (TWITTER BRASIL, 2020).

Google's text guide called "5 Approaches That Are Helping Brands and People in Brazil During COVID-19", gathers insights from the company's marketing professionals, and aims to provide resources and solutions for communicating brands with their customers during the pandemic. The text lists five approaches that have been used by Brazilian companies and cites examples of actions that have worked. The strategies and models are (THINK WITH GOOGLE, 2020):

1. Help whenever possible – Ambev has been producing gel alcohol and face protectors with pet bottles, items that are being donated to hospitals.
2. Special conditions for customers - Airbnb has applied a new policy for canceling bookings without penalty.
3. Adaptation to the business model – Brands like Domino's pizzeria and other delivery apps have offered the option of "physical contactless delivery."
4. Actions of social impact – the startup of São Paulo Loft created a fund of R\$ 5 million for construction workers, ensuring that its employees can stay at home during the quarantine.

5. Change of tone - with the campaign "Together. Hand in hand or not", the Free Market changed its visual identity: the log, as before holding hands, became a kind of elbow greeting.

Such actions must be present in the communication, building a positive memory, and, consequently, bringing returns in sales, brand value, and credibility, during and after the pandemic. The guides of the two companies, in summary, deliver recommendations for two paths: communication and adaptation of the business model. It exemplifies how adaptable business can be through the delivery modality, delivery which has been considered essential for the maintenance not only of small businesses but also to maintain social isolation, a fact demonstrated with the 200% increase in searches by the term "market delivery near me" between 24 February and 22 March (THINK WITH GOOGLE, 2020).

Furthermore, using clear communication adapted to a period of pandemic and social isolation, companies can ensure consumer confidence by focusing on actions that demonstrate how their products and services can help them during the epidemic, expressing empathy and support to the people who are most affected by the crisis. So, how to communicate is taking care of its

employees and customers, and changes in activities during the pandemic. Companies now act as a source of information that people turn to and providing social support to consumers is one way to help them cope with the crisis.

REFERENCES

DURSKI, J. **30, 40 Million** Unemployed. Instagram, 2020. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/B-FtEpyFZT/> Access: 8 May. 2020.

EDELMAN. **Barometer Edelman Trust. Trust** Special Report: Trust in brands and Coronavirus pandemic (Brazilian and global data). 2020. Available in: https://www.edelman.com.br/sites/g/files/aatuss291/files/2020-04/2020%20ETB%20Brands%20and%20the%20Coronavirus_Brasil%20com%20Global_POR.pdf. Accessed: 5 May. 2020.

MACHADO, J.; BARICHELLO, E. Communication of crisis in digital social media: a study of Twitter, Facebook and Petrobras corporate blog. **Organicom**. v. 12, n. 22 p. 187-197.

SALVADOR, A. B.; IKEDA, A. A. Brand crisis management: the use of information for prevention, identification and management. **Brazilian Business Management Magazine**, v. 20, n. 1, 2018.

THINK WITH GOOGLE. **5 approaches that are helping brands and people in Brazil during COVID-19**. 2020. Available in: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/pt-br/tendencias-de-consumo/5-abordagens-que-estao-ajudando-marcas-e-pessoas-no-brasil-durante-a-covid-19/>. Accessed: 5 May. 2020.

TWITTER BRAZIL. **Brand communication in times of crisis**. 2020. Available in: https://blog.twitter.com/pt_br/topics/company/2019/comunicacao-de-marca-em-tempos-de-crise.html. Accessed: 8 May. 2020.

WHO. **World Health Organization**. 2020. Available in: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>. Accessed: 5 May. 2020.

WORLD BANK. **The Economy in the Time of Covid-19**. ALC Semiannual Report, April 2020. Available in: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33555>. Accessed: 7 May. 2020.

CONTATO

Karen Batista

Universidade Federal de Sergipe, São Cristóvão, Sergipe, Brasil.

E-mail: karen.batista@hotmail.com

Ana Paula Moura Saran

Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Goiás, Brasil.

E-mail: anapmsaran@gmail.com

Ricardo Limongi

Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Goiás, Brasil.

E-mail: ricardolimongi@ufg.br

André Luiz Barbosa da Silva

Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Goiás, Brasil.

E-mail: andre_luiz_b_silva@hotmail.com

Alessandra Cristina Gomes

Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Goiás, Brasil.

E-mail: alessandra.face.ufg@gmail.com